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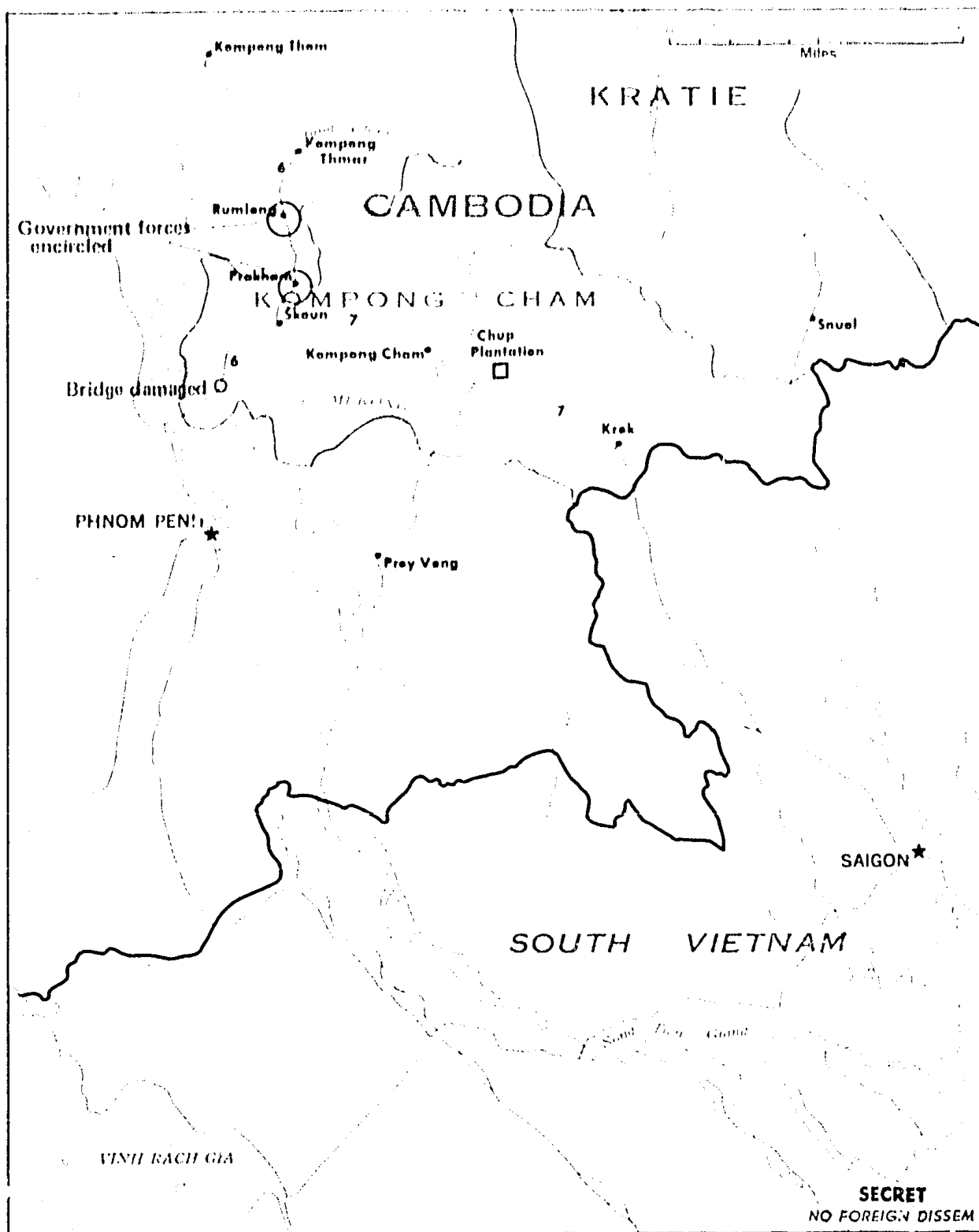
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CAMBODIA: Government forces are attempting to regain the initiative along Route 6.

Four battalions of reinforcements accompanied by armored vehicles began moving up Route 6 from Skoun on 31 October in an effort to relieve eight Cambodian battalions that have been encircled between the villages of Prakham and Rumlong. At the same time, Khmer Krom battalions from Kompong Thmar have moved down the highway to within a mile of Rumlong, which has been the object of some of the Communists' sharpest attacks.

All of the besieged battalions reportedly are running critically short of supplies. South Vietnamese helicopters attempting to resupply Rumlong's defenders were driven off by intense enemy ground fire on 30 October. Some supplies apparently have since been successfully airdropped, however. Phnom Penh's efforts to send materiel and reinforcements overland via Route 6 have been complicated by the extensive damage the Communists caused last week to a key bridge on the highway, some 12 miles south of Skoun.

There is evidence, meanwhile, that the Communists have committed more of their crack troops to support their operations against Route 6, suggesting that the campaign represents the beginning of their dry season offensive in Cambodia.

The current round of enemy attacks along Route 6 probably is motivated in part by the Communists' desire to re-establish their control over the highway to facilitate the movement of supplies to their forces west of the road now that better weather is approaching. They probably also want to undermine Phnom Penh's morale by inflicting some sharp setbacks on what has been the Cambodians' best-organized military operation of the war. It is also possible that the Communists are seeking to forestall

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whatever plans the government might be developing for operations in the direction of important enemy bases and supply points east of Route 6 or into Kompong Cham or Kratie provinces. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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AFRICA - MIDDLE EAST: Four African heads of state, charged by the Organization of African Unity to find a way to break the Middle East deadlock, begin talks today with Israeli officials in Jerusalem and will go on to Cairo later this week.

Senegal's President Senghor, chairman of the delegation that includes Nigeria's Gowon, Cameroon's Ahidjo, and Mobutu of the Zaire Republic (formerly Congo-Kinshasa), has said that the mission will be exploratory. The delegation is scheduled to convene later in Dakar with other African leaders who together make up the OAU Committee of Ten "Wise Men" on the Middle East. The African initiative is the result of an OAU resolution last June that represents the strongest pro-Arab pronouncement so far adopted by the organization. The Africans, however, claim that they do not feel bound by the tone of the resolution, and neither the "wise men" nor the four-man delegation appears weighted in favor of either side.

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The Egyptians appear hopeful that they can put the delegation to some use. At the UN last month Foreign Minister Riyad announced that Egypt would not push for a special General Assembly debate on the Middle East until the four African leaders concluded their mission.

The committee is unlikely to make any significant contribution to the settlement of the Middle East problem. The initiative in general appears to be vaguely formulated and could easily founder on the bickering and division that sometimes mark OAU activities. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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FINLAND: President Kekkonen has had to appoint a government of civil service experts until elections can be held on 2-3 January because of intense political maneuvering by the country's major parties.

The Social Democrats were the most obdurate contestants in the fight that brought down the seven-month-old coalition government of Prime Minister Karjalainen. Engaged in a battle with the Communists for control of Finland's largest trade union, they were unwilling to agree to a higher level of agricultural price supports and then would not allow their ministers to remain in a "caretaker" government.

The Center Party, the other major member of the four-party coalition, pressed for higher price supports in order to recover support among its constituents, who feel they have suffered disproportionately under the country's ten-month-old economic stabilization program. The party hopes its stand will enable it to recover votes lost in the March 1970 elections, when the electorate moved right.

The stabilization program, which must be renegotiated early next year, therefore will be the key campaign issue. However, Finnish politicians predict that a Finnish arrangement with the European Communities, a sensitive issue in Helsinki's all-important relations with Moscow, also will be significant.

Despite the present split between the Center and Social Democrats, both parties probably will form the core of the next government, because the other two sizable parties are unacceptable to the USSR as government members.

Both the Center and Social Democrats--as well as Kekkonen--probably prefer that the Communists participate in the next government. They withdrew from the last one in March when the party's liberal leadership, under attack from a strong conservative

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minority, felt unable to accept co-responsibility for the government's economic decisions. Although the Communists often obstruct orderly government, many Finns probably believe they would be less dangerous within the next government that will have important economic decisions to make. Although still badly split, the Communists are participating in the caretaker government. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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TUNISIA: The government installed last Friday represents a minority faction of the ruling Destourian Socialist Party (PSD).

The political crisis was forced early last week by the resignation of several stalwarts of former interior minister Ahmed Mestiri's liberal faction of the PSD--a group that is pressing President Bouguiba to proceed with democratic reforms endorsed by the recent party congress. The liberals had won a majority in the party's central committee. Faced with the refusal of most liberals to participate in the new government, Prime Minister Nour put together a government that fails to represent the new temper of the congress. It is fairly representative geographically, however.

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Only two partisans of the liberal wing have accepted governmental posts. Taieb Slim returns as minister of state, a position second in prestige to prime minister, while a Mestiri lieutenant, Ahmed Chtourou, takes over the important portfolio of youth and sports.

Despite the dominance of the traditionalists, a Tunisian official close to the prime minister told the US Embassy that Mestiri had won an important victory at the party congress and that his attempts to force changes in the party and government may indeed accelerate the pace of liberalization. This official believes that everyone, especially Nour, is aware of the genuine ground swell for reform. Probably as a result, Nour chaired a meeting of the party's political bureau on Sunday

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to study practical measures for implementing congress resolutions. Apparently nothing was decided at the meeting about the status of Mestiri, whom Bourguiba suspended from party activities nearly two weeks ago pending consideration of his case by a disciplinary committee. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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PHILIPPINES: The government's goal of rice self-sufficiency is even further out of reach because of disease damage to new high-yielding rice varieties. Almost two percent of the area devoted to high-yielding rice has been hit by a virus, and total rice production for the 1972 crop year is now expected to run at least three percent below the poor 1971 level. The Philippine Government had estimated earlier that production would increase five percent. The country was almost self-sufficient in rice during 1968-70, but shortfalls in the 1971 crop have forced Manila to import some 200,000 tons so far this year and arrangements for an additional 260,000 tons have already been made. If the virus continues to spread, next year's import requirements will almost certainly be substantially higher.
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